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PATRIOTISM AND HUMANITY.

F. MELIAN STAWELL.

WHAT is this patriotism in the name of which almost all the nations of Europe are now at each other's throats? It has caused, or helped to cause, this appalling tragedy, this welter of courage and fury, at once so horrible, so sublime, and so foolish. Over all the western world millions of men and women are ready to give their lives and all that privately they hold dear, each and all for their own country. At least it is not for lack of raw spiritual force that the world must undergo such unfathomable misery. This is some comfort in the darkness. Plainly there is enough heroism on the planet to make a heaven of it, could we only unite the wills of nations instead of each defying the other to the death. Why must they be at this defiance, nations that ought to lead the world in harmony? Why must the sweetness of self-sacrifice turn to the bitterness of murder? Is there any sinister necessity that must drive us to this?

There is a grim doctrine that answers, Yes, because it looks at each nation as in practice limited to its own interest. The sole duty with which the ordinary citizen need concern himself is the duty to his country; and for the sake of its growth in power and dominion he must be prepared not only to die himself but to take the lives of others. Something like this underlies the coarser conception of patriotism everywhere; "My country, right or wrong!" is a common cry; and in Germany throughout this generation such a doctrine has been taught. Yet the moment it is clearly stated the deeper mind of man rises up in revolt. Why, we ask, and we ask it in the very name of patriotism, should the nation be limited to the beggarly ideal of its own advantage? Is not the advantage of all men a much greater thing? And is not the real

greatness of a nation bound up with its service to that? Now it is so hard for man to deny this, since after all man has reason and reason dwells with the universal, that even the war-patriots admit it. But they admit it perfunctorily and do their best to nullify it by assuming that the advantage of the whole is best served when each section forgets the whole and fights for itself. Perhaps what Europe is now suffering may bring home to the imagination of men something of the stupendous folly in this assumption. But how does it come to be made at all? Both through the good and the bad in man. An intense and narrow patriotism appeals to both: to man's insight and to his blindness, to his power of self-sacrifice and to the petty arrogance that makes the individual value only himself and those who immediately resemble him. "We, and we only, are the Chosen People"—that, in one form or another, has been the battle-cry of every nation bent on conquest. But the real value of patriotism goes back to the value of free self-development for all men in company with their fellows; to the conception that humanity must grow through the work, not of one individual or of few or of many, but of all, each with a unique value and therefore each with not only a right but a duty to work out his own contribution. Conflict of will may and does occur in the working-out, but such conflict cannot be of the essence, and indeed all who believe in any society at all believe at least in an approach to a peaceful solution, a solution that depends on the individual having sufficient fairness of mind to consider others beside himself.

It is comforting at the present time to remember that these fundamental ideas have been expressed with supreme power by Germans. It was a German, Kant, who laid down the rule that every man must be treated as an end in himself, never merely as a means. It was Kant again who formulated the majestic vision of a Kingdom of Ends, a harmony of free human spirits. It was a German, Goethe, who never wearied of insisting that "mankind could only be made by all men," just as the world was only made by

all its powers together; that the endless gifts and glories lying latent in humanity must all be developed, "only not in one individual, but in many."¹ Goethe never denied that conflict and contradiction occur, but he always pointed to their solution in "the power of the spirit." He would call no man "right" who insisted that only he was right:

"No man is right, unless he heal
Strife in the strength of spirit, understand
Others, though he should ne'er be understood."²

The same principles underlie the complicated problems of nationality. The value of a nation is bound up with the value of individuality; we value diversity among nations just because we see that individuals are, as a matter of natural fact, grouped into diverse types, and need, as a rule, for their development, to work with men and women of their own type. It is by his natural comrades, above all, that a man is made: it is with them first and foremost that he can make a true society. True nationality goes down as deep as friendship, or family affection, or any other elective affinity. A man cannot live to himself alone, and in his country he can share best in a greater life, a life best not only for himself but for thousands more, and, through them, of unique value for the world. The ordinary man of courage and patriotism does not of course put it to himself in this abstract way; he loves his country as he loves his mother, and fights for her from this instinctive feeling without further analysis. But behind the instinct lies, for its justification, this belief, and where the belief itself is justified it justifies a nation's birth and existence as a separate unity.

Always justified, we must admit, it cannot be: it may be better for the world, in certain extreme cases, that a national unity should not be made at all, or, when made, should be superseded. Few people can regret the failure of the Southern Confederacy in America to form an independent

¹ *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre*. Bk. VIII, Cap. V.

² *Paldophron und Neoterpe*, 1, 198.

polity, and, in any case, just as in Ireland at the present day, the party of union and the party of separation could not both be right. Something higher must be called in to decide between such rival convictions. The individual nation, just as the individual person, must be able to look beyond itself, and, if necessary, fulfil itself by sacrificing itself. But though the instinct towards national self-preservation, like every other instinct, is not infallible, it does, in the vast majority of instances, point true, so that there are few things in all the world oftener worth fighting for than a nation's life. We speak of the true nation, not to be confounded with the artificial empires held together merely by force. Such empires sin, themselves, against nationality. But some form of the genuine nation, the willing corporate life, appears vital to men's ideal, and so it comes about that the loyal citizen always sees his own country, so to speak, under the aureole of what it might be. But why should his vision end there? A foreign country has an aureole, too. Does anyone at bottom believe that one nation only, one type only, could exhaust the infinite varied possibilities of humanity? Or that freedom and independence are only good for a single class? If he does, there is no more to be said: his aim should be the absorption of all other States into his own. These States, no doubt, will resist, and war will never end. But the foolish poverty of such a belief is plain to all who reflect. It is as foolish as to think that one man could sum up all men. Even Treitschke, with his deification of the State, will assert emphatically, "All people, just like individual men, are one-sided, but in the very fullness of this one-sidedness the richness of the human race is seen. The rays of the divine light only appear in individual nations infinitely broken; each one exhibits a different picture and a different conception of the divinity."³ Unfortunately, in theory and in practice, hold is lost again and again on this noble and far-reaching conception. Could we but keep to it, wars between nations would be at least as rare as civil wars.

³ Selections from Treitschke's *Lectures on Politics*. Tr. A. L. Gowans, p. 10.

This may seem a truism, but it is for want of insistence on this truism that the world is drenched with blood and horror.

It is well to teach citizenship and rouse patriotism, but we ought to repeat after every lesson the words of those great leaders whose love for their fatherland made them exult in another's love for his. "*Il ne voulut pas qu'il fut sur la terre un homme sans patrie.*" Another's nationality ought to be as sacred to us as our own: an alien nation is mother to her citizens just as truly as ours can be to us. Why do we forget this? It is common sense and common humanity; but against it we have natural bias, defective education, and narrow statesmanship. Difference of race is a primitive barrier, and difference of tradition and outlook become barriers in their turn. The very passion with which a man's own ideal is followed obscures for him another's right to follow his, and this is as true for nations as it is for parties and creeds. National intolerance can be as bitter and unfair as ever religious intolerance has been, and it possesses, in addition, a peculiar vulgarity of its own. The self-laudation of a people is more grotesque, because more self-centered, than the fanaticism of any creed. There are excuses for it, no doubt: the initial task of raising the mass of citizens to the pitch of being willing to die for their country is not an easy one; faced with the apathy and the selfishness of the ordinary mortal, it is natural for the orator to foster any impulse that will help. How natural, and how dangerous, can be seen from the ordinary recruiting-speeches in war-time with their perpetual inference that the foreigner must be the devil and the nation the salt of the earth if the war is really a holy war.

But the progress of the world depends now on the nations advancing beyond all this. There is no other way; we have got to set up a counsel of perfection and aim at the impossible, if we are ever to escape. We must keep patriotism, and yet go beyond it, if we are to save what is best in patriotism itself, just as for the sake of religion,

religious men had to go beyond their own willingness to die for their own faith. Toleration demanded not irreligion, but a better religion, and we might have a better patriotism if we could remember that we are also citizens of the world. But for this double end we need the rare spirit that will fight to the death against tyranny, and yet abjure all tyrannizing itself. The problem can only be solved so—never, while aggression lingers anywhere, by any simple Tolstoyan doctrine of non-resistance, as inadequate to the complexity of the facts as any simple Chauvinism could be. Tolstoyanism, no doubt, is only inadequate, and in Chauvinism the pressing danger lies. It may be the primary duty of every nation to defend its own interest, but certainly it is not its only duty, and yet we all act as though it were.

The best interests of our own countrymen, we may be right in believing, cannot run counter to the good of the whole, but their immediate and obvious interests can and often do, and when they do, they ought to be surrendered. That this may seem a hard saying only shows the vice of our international statesmanship. Nations have got to live together, and this they cannot do without some give-and-take, but most of us want only to take and never give. Germany has no right to Tsing-tau, we say in England, but what of our own right to Wei-hai-wei? No unprejudiced European could think of a Europe without a powerful France, a powerful Germany, a powerful England, except as a Europe crippled and mutilated, and yet through our absurd rivalries and selfishnesses we have reached a pass where thousands of us are striving for such an end. A patriot may do well to strive, other things being equal, for his nation's growth and gain in power. But infinitely much turns on that little pedantic phrase "*other things being equal*," and it is infinitely easy to overlook it. It would be absurd to deny that, other things being equal, national power may serve ideal ends: Englishmen, for example, were far more likely than Norwegians to gain good conditions for the Balkan peoples simply because England is far more powerful than Norway. But it is

equally absurd to speak as though England had always used her power well.

Or take the desire for colonies: There may be a real spiritual gain to a people in experiencing the ties of a varied community, scattered over the world, and still conscious of a common tradition, a common language, a common ideal. This vivid sense of kinship in difference is a great thing for men to feel, and they seldom feel it outside the limits of political union, and the common work that political union involves. For nothing unites men like common work. It is the consciousness of this that makes so many German colonists try so hard to secure places where they may keep unbroken the old political ties. They have the vision of a new Germany, giving to and receiving from the old, more closely bound to it than any separate nationality could be. No one who understands this ideal could deny its worth. Humanitarians ought not to decry it as a sheer illusion, and one could wish that England had set herself more generously to help Germany towards its attainment, so far as it could have been attained without injury to others. The trouble is that a nation in pursuit of such a goal usually forgets all about injury to others, loses all sense of proportion, and thus really does fall under an illusion, and a most disastrous one, when it is ready to inflict the untold miseries of war simply to gain in territory and power. There were abundant proofs of such an illusion in modern Germany, and it was that, more than any other single factor, which checked any generosity that England might have felt.

The value of expansion itself has been, in general, enormously exaggerated of late years, and its drawbacks and temptations overlooked. The nation that takes up these huge straggling tasks and complicated responsibilities foregoes many advantages, moral and material, possessed by the simpler, less encumbered, life of the small compact states. But still the task has value, and our international system would be unhealthy if it could not make room for both types.

So with the training of the backward races: Many nations would do better to let this task alone, and yet there really is a valuable work to be done here, if it could be done in the true missionary spirit without humbug or domineering. Doubtless, only too often, the backward peoples are trained simply to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the dominant race until the generous heart is ready to sicken at the talk of "the white man's burden," as nothing but so much tyrannical cant. For, as with individuals, so with nations, close to the genuine desire for a wider sphere of usefulness lies the unbridled lust of power for itself, regardless of any further end. The temptations that cluster around this desire are perhaps the deepest in man, and all the deeper because power itself is necessary to many of his finest activities. Certain it is that most people, at least in our active world of the West, desire power much more than they desire money or ease, in fact usually they only want money for the sake of power, or ease as a sign of it. Even where they do not desire mastery for their personal selves, they will desire it for the persons most like them, those with whom they naturally sympathize, their class, their party, their sex, their nation. And the temptation becomes the more insidious because it is in part unselfish.

Here is a fundamental cause of war, perhaps the most fundamental. Goethe, in his deep quiet way, saw this and showed it to us. He saw the dreadful vision of war rising again and again through the ages; the recurrent spectre that man must face on his way in the search for peace and beauty. It was the thirst for power that would not let the ghost be laid.

"How often has it risen! Yes, and it will rise
Ever and evermore! No man yields sovereignty
Unto his fellow: none will yield to him
Who won the power by force, and by force keeps his hold.
For man, who cannot rule his own unruly heart,
Is hot to rule his neighbor, bind him to his will."⁴

⁴ Faust, Part II, Act 2, ll. 7012 ff.

This aggressive passion, reinforcing and reinforced by mistaken ideas of duty and patriotism, will sweep everything before it, humanity, reason, self-interest, desire for comfort, love of life. Nothing, good or bad, arrests a people once there is roused in them both the instinct of self-sacrifice and the hope of dominion.

If it were only for wealth that men fought nowadays it would not be so hard to stop them. Norman Angell has shown convincingly that in war between civilized countries, countries with equal productive activities, the conqueror's gain in territory cannot be supposed to bring any gain in wealth. It is a great thing to have shown this; but, unfortunately, a gain in territory, though it may bring no gain in wealth, almost always brings a gain in power, at any rate for the time. The conqueror can dictate his will to a people who would have refused utterly to obey it before. Zabern has to listen to the Kaiser's men. What profit in this, we may ask, to the conqueror? Little or none to his soul, maybe, but much to his pride, and the student of history must face the fact that not only kings, but whole communities, can give themselves up to this thirst for domination. It is a tragic passion, because it is the excess, and therefore the degradation, of a fine one. Leadership becomes tyranny, and self-development ambition.

Almost every nation in Europe has gone wrong through this: "We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God." France and England to-day think that Germany is the greatest criminal in this respect, and perhaps just now she is, but it was not so long ago that an Englishman, Gladstone, could say of his countrymen, "The people of these islands are mad and drunk with aggression." That was shortly before the Boer war, and it is ill for us if we look back at that time now, and do not realize how the unchecked desire to get things done our own way blinded our people and made them consent to the monstrous wrong of killing brave men, because, rightly or wrongly, they would not yield to us on a point that seemed to threaten

their own independence. With us, too, no doubt, the impulses of conquest and greed were mixed with far better ones, with a genuine belief that our opponents were themselves grasping and tyrannical, and that we ought not to allow such misgovernment to continue. But if we could have stood outside our own prejudices and laid aside the exaggeration of our own importance, should we ever have thought the Boer offences, serious as they were, enough to justify war?

It is this persistent over-estimation of ourselves that makes us all confuse our own selfishness with a divine task to civilize the world, and count ourselves, as Carlyle sixty years ago could say France counted herself, and as we reproach Germany for counting herself to-day, "a People whose bayonets are sacred, a kind of Messiah People, saving a blind world in its own despite, and earning for themselves a terrestrial and even celestial glory very considerable indeed."⁵ And it all aids that pitiful shackling of imagination which cannot apprehend the waste and agony of war until too late. For once war has begun it is almost impossible for a nation honestly to examine its own case. It is too terrible for us to think that we are giving our best and bravest in an unjust cause. Hence, and not through mere hypocrisy and murderous spite, every nation at war tends to throw the whole blame for the horror on its opponents, and assert, in the face of everything, that it is acting purely on the defensive, and cannot be in any sense to blame. Left to itself, it will not yield one point of its case. This is the great and the overwhelming argument for arbitration. A neutral is far more likely to look at the quarrel fairly, and give at least a chance for the better spirit of each nation to re-assert itself. If we could remember that what is wanted is a just decision, and not merely our own triumph, we should all accept arbitration, at least as a preliminary measure. For it is only a worn-out superstition that can believe the just cause more likely to win by wager of battle than before an unprejudiced

⁵ Latter-Day Pamphlets, No. 1 (written in 1850).

court. Even now, there is no thinking mind in Europe that is not thankful for the existence of America, merely as a great neutral Power that can judge without self-interest, free from the hallucinations that are bred of the desperate struggle.

For in war we are surrounded not only by actual horrors, but by horrible phantoms. It is not true that all Germans or all Englishmen are callous monsters, each an embodiment of all that is worst in his nation; they are individuals infinitely varied, some cruel, some chivalrous, almost all convinced that they are suffering in a righteous cause. It would be laughable, if it were not piteous, to need to say this, and yet, obviously, it needs saying. And more needs saying. It is held on all sides that war between England and Germany was "inevitable," and this quite apart from the immediate occasion, the invasion of Belgium, a fact which in the writer's opinion left England with no choice between war and the breaking of her pledge. Apart from this, what was there to make war inevitable? There is nothing incompatible in our natures, our cultures, our fundamental ideals. We are the most alike of any two peoples in Europe, linked by a thousand ties of friendship, of marriage, of joint work in science, of common enthusiasms in literature and art. Even now, to many of us, this war is like a civil war. Nor was there any insuperable difficulty in the external conditions. The world is quite large enough for both of us, given a little reason on both sides. What then was the deciding cause? The aggressive spirit in Germany, men in England answer; the jealous greed of England, men in Germany retort. On either side we see nothing but the sins of the foe. Even in the fever that all this misery brings, cannot we both be honest? Cannot Englishmen admit that some of them did encourage greed? Have we so soon forgotten our talk of "painting the map red?" And cannot Germans admit that some of them did preach aggression? Why do we each set up a double unreality, an idealized perfect England opposed to an utterly damnable Germany, or an idealized perfect Ger-

many opposed to an utterly damnable England? We are nothing, either of us, but two sets of fallible human beings, needing each other's forgiveness, longing at bottom for each other's good-will.

I write that last sentence deliberately, even in the tempest of hatred which is the worst part of war, because only by recalling our own deepest desires, the desires our whole heart approves, can we save ourselves or our nation from the tyranny of the meaner. Even in war the desire that our own people should win is not so deep, after all, as the desire that they should act rightly and be fair, but we grow blinded and what we lose sight of we forget. That is why it is worth repeating the platitudes of which some are so impatient, the old divine commonplaces about the brotherhood of man and the goal of all humanity. Incalculable harm has been done in Germany by a preaching that neglected these or defied them. Through that there was growing in her, it cannot be doubted (however we divide the blame and whatever sins we have been guilty of ourselves) a spirit ready to risk war, not for the sake of national existence, but for a mere increase in national power. It is only in such a spirit that a man could write complacently "the result of our next successful war must, if possible, be the acquisition of some colony."⁶ Nothing could be further removed from reality than such *Realpolitik*. For no man, of whatever nation, in any hour of reason, could believe the hideous suffering of war really justified by such an end. If he saw things as they are, he would as soon justify a candidate for assassinating his competitors—sooner, inasmuch as the war-misery is wider and deeper. But under the sway of a national thirst for empire a man does not see things as they are: he deludes himself with a vain-glorious and idolatrous worship of his own civilization; he dreams of it as something so universally superior to all others that its success more than atones for all the horrors on the way. He is scarcely saner than the hapless criminal in Dostoieffsky's *Crime and Punishment*,

⁶ Treitschke. *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

the youth who murders the grasping old pawnbroker just to show his Napoleonic gift for success in life. Patriotism, in short, once shut up to itself, turns diabolic. The Nation becomes a Moloch:

“The God of old time will act Satan new
If we keep him not straight at the higher God aimed.”

This is the real tragedy of patriotism, and it can be felt in numberless utterances now, from all of us, but especially from the German leaders and publicists. Their patriotism, while it is the most fiery and convinced in Europe, has become the most fanatical and narrow. A single and relative duty has been exalted into something absolute and universal, and it is to this tragic blunder that we must ascribe much of the elements that have appalled us in their conduct of the war, the unscrupulous diplomacy, the cruel proclamations, the savage reprisals, the insensate hatred of England. That the kinsfolk of Goethe and Beethoven should be proud of hatred is one of the most grievous things in all this grief. An evil doctrine has obscured reason and humanity in a people essentially reasonable and humane, and nothing could show more clearly the harm that evil doctrine can do.

I would not, let me add, suggest for a moment that the whole German nation has taken up the ordeal of war through this spirit alone. But the spirit has been there, and the uncompromising expression of it, long before the war began, increased enormously the fear and defiance in the other nations. And upon that, as always, fear bred fear and defiance. Alarm of Germany riveted the Triple Entente, and the Triple Entente alarmed Germany. She saw herself surrounded and shut in by possible enemies, and so things went on, acting and reacting, hurrying from bad to worse, until at last the strongest of the war-parties could precipitate war. Ambition alone did not make this war, nor fear alone, but the two together, mutual between the nations, woven inextricably. It may look hopeless, this net of our own weaving, but

there is hope, after all, if we can only weaken the first threads, the impulses of dominance, whether of one nation over many, or of many over one. We shall never weaken them, whichever side succeeds, if we nurse the spirit of revenge. All revenge is aggression, and the history of Europe seems an unending Oresteia, the age-long tragedy of an ancestral curse, a blood-feud fed and fed again by the excess of the punishment taken for an undoubted wrong. It is only the Orestes who fights without hatred that can bring such ruin to an end. And if the task before Europe is harder even than his, we can only say that we must attempt it or be destroyed. The hell that an unthinking nationalism can make is now before us, and the one hope for the next generation is that the horror of it may so burn itself into our consciences and theirs as to be unforgettable.

And perhaps, when all is said, we magnify the difficulty. National feeling is tenacious, but nothing is more noteworthy than the ease with which some men and women, and those of the finest temper, can change their nation, adopt another country, and side with it even against the country of their birth. To-day there are Germans more English in sympathy than the English themselves, and English men and women on the side of Germany. So to train national feeling that it leaves room for internationalism ought to be no more impossible than to admit political parties in a state and yet avoid civil war.

But to that end we must remodel the ordinary patriotic teaching, as it shows itself everywhere, in popular education, in the daily press, in the works of the learned, in the acts of our statesmen. There should never be an appeal for duty to our own country apart from our duty to the foreigner. The statesman who was unfair to another nation should be denounced as a traitor to his own. Our sneers at other countries in peace or war, in the Old World or the New, our inveterate habits of dwelling complacently on our rivals' faults, ought to be recognized for what they are, the seeds of future wars. If a man has not width of imagination enough to sympathize with the alien let him

pray for it, and until he wins it, let him hold his tongue. It is only sympathy that can balance national pride, and both are vital to the world. "The soul," said Whitman in one of his finest passages, "has that measureless pride which consists in never acknowledging any lessons or deductions but its own. But it has sympathy as measureless as its pride and the one balances the other, and neither can stretch too far, while it stretch in company with the other."⁷ This, that is true of the soul, might be made to be true of the nation. It is idle to talk of it all as unreal and Utopian. The folly and unreality are with those who, in the name of freedom and self-development, send their own people in thousands to a needless and futile slaughter, who, under the banner of civilization, arrest or destroy every nobler work of man and waste heroism in cruelty.

If European culture is to be saved from this, it must be by a spirit that can get beyond the bound of an exclusive nationalism, and concern itself with the welfare of the States of Europe, equal and free, united in essence if not in definite form. This war cannot last for ever, and even in its torture, even though we see that, however it ends, it must leave indescribable bitterness behind it, let us prepare ourselves for the better things, the more real things, the things that make for reconciliation.

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⁷ Preface 1855 to first issue of *Leaves of Grass*.